

Trauma deepens for Ukraine war widows and orphans

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KYIV, Ukraine (BP)—Sofiya hasn't spoken since officials found the 6-year-old wandering in a field of debris days after Russia bombed her village near Kharkiv.

Officials haven't been able to locate Sofiya's mother.



Sofiya, shown with minister Anara Grace, hasn't spoken since officials found her wandering among the ruins of Kharhiv after Russia attacked the city. (Submitted photo)

Anara Grace, a Kazakhstan native and member of the prayer ministry of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., saw Sofiya this summer while visiting hard-hit Kyiv.

"She couldn't speak because of shock she experienced," Grace said. "There are so many people I met ... in different places in Kyiv. They're

traumatized, and they need emotional healing.”

Grace, who founded [Voice of the Silent](#), a ministry to women and children, in 2019, sees the pain of widows and orphans traumatized by Russia’s war on Ukraine.

Grace is building a home for orphans and widows near Mykulychi, a village outside devastated Bucha.

Lada Smell, a Voice of the Silent partner and an adoptive and foster parent of 21 children, is caring for Sofiya. Grace is concerned for the growing number of orphans and widows she said are struggling daily as the war nears another winter.

Grace saw widows and orphans in hospitals and heard their stories of suffering during a one-month trip to Ukraine in July and August.

“In front of their eyes, families were killed, in front of people,” Grace said. “They’re just heartbreaking stories, even very difficult to hear, and I can’t imagine to watch it.

“You can feel the hurt, what they experienced. You can feel it.”

She provided emotional support, visited churches, and donated necessities including food, clothing, blankets and school supplies. The cost of living has skyrocketed during the war, and there are few social programs to help.

Help subsiding as war continues

Through local partners in Ukraine and Europe, Voice for the Silent is among many humanitarian outreach initiatives to the war-torn area. But as the war lingers, Grace senses help is subsiding.

“They still need so much help,” she said. They need trauma care. Many are

questioning God. Grace encourages churches in the United States to continue to help.

While visiting Ukraine might be out of reach for many, Grace points to ministry to Ukrainian refugees in Poland and other places in Europe as more achievable.

Ukraine has not issued an official number of the war dead, but U.S. officials estimate nearly 500,000 Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have died in the war. Confirmed civilian casualties in Ukraine alone numbered 9,614 deaths and 17,535 injuries through Sept. 11, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights reported.

Grace's outreach to Ukraine predates by a decade or more the official founding of her ministry after Russia's 2014 invasion of Donetsk and annexation of Crimea. She lived for a year in Ukraine in 2009 and describes a vibrant Christian community in the former Soviet country.

She is looking for ministry partners in the U.S. and abroad. Completion of the widows and orphan home near Bucha will take another \$40,000, she said.

"This time, God gave me a very clear vision. We still need to work and help them," she said. "We are family. We are God's children, all of us. And we need to help them because who knows what in the future we will experience."